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Subregional Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa

Report of the Secretary-General**

Summary

The present report, submitted in accordance with General Assembly resolution 63/177, provides an overview of the work carried out by the Subregional Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa and the most significant developments in its operations from September 2008 to August 2009. It provides details on activities carried out in the areas of capacity-building for Governments in the region, technical cooperation and advisory activities, democracy and peace support, public information and dissemination of documentation, as well as the creation of more innovative partnerships with Governments, subregional organizations, civil society organizations, United Nations agencies and diplomatic missions.

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** The present document is submitted late owing to the need to incorporate last-minute amendments to a change in middle/senior management at the Yaoundé Centre.

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I. Introduction

1. The Subregional Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa (hereafter the Centre) was established in 2001 at the request of the member States of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), pursuant to the resolution adopted by the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa at its fourth meeting, in April 1994 in Yaoundé, as well as to General Assembly resolutions 53/78 A and 54/55 A. The mandate of the Centre is to contribute to capacity-building in the area of promotion and protection of human rights, to support the establishment and strengthening of national human rights institutions and to assist in the dissemination of and sensitization to international human rights instruments. The Centre is also mandated to promote democracy and the rule of law throughout the subregion and to work towards the prevention of conflicts and the promotion of sustainable peace and development.

2. The Centre operates under the auspices of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), and the High Commissioner officially inaugurated the Centre in June 2002. It is currently staffed with a Director, a Regional Adviser for Democracy, two Human Rights Officers, a National Programme Officer in charge of the library and databases, and four assistant-level local staff (two were recruited after the adoption of General Assembly resolution 62/221).

II. Human rights and peace and security

3. During the period under review, there were notable advances towards peace and reconciliation, with political negotiations leading to peace processes in some countries. However, the Great Lakes region and neighbouring areas were characterized by continued violence in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, Chad and the Central African Republic. These situations highlighted the fragility of peace and the need for sustainable solutions that take into account issues of accountability.

A. Peace efforts and human rights concerns

4. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, despite the implementation of the Goma Declaration of 16 January 2009 signed between the Government and rebel groups, the joint Rwandan-Democratic Republic of the Congo military action against the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda, as well as the current operation of Congolese Armed Forces against the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda, mass killings, sexual violence and other violations of international humanitarian law have continued. In the Central African Republic, the agreement signed by political parties and rebel groups in December 2008 during an inclusive political dialogue has not yet been implemented, due to the resumption of rebel activities in the northern and eastern areas of the Central African Republic. These military activities are increasing displacements of the population and both official and rebel forces are operating in total impunity, in areas throughout the country where there is an absence of State administration. A similar situation is prevailing in eastern Chad, where killings, sexual abuses and inter-ethnic massacres

are regularly reported. In replacement of the European Force deployed in March 2008, the United Nations has deployed, as of 15 March 2009, a peacekeeping operation in eastern Chad and north-eastern Central African Republic, the United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad, with an important human rights component. In the Central African Republic, the United Nations is in the process of transforming the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office in the Central African Republic into an integrated mission.

5. Encouraging steps towards peace were taken in many areas of the region. In Burundi, the Government and the Palipehutu-Forces nationales de libération armed opposition group signed a final accord of cessation of hostilities after they succeeded in resolving the two remaining outstanding stumbling blocks: Palipehutu-Forces nationales de libération accepted to comply with the Constitution and to change its name so as to remove any ethnic reference, and both sides agreed on a power-sharing scheme in the process mediated by the Government of South Africa. A joint verification and follow-up mechanism was set up to accompany the implementation of the peace agreement. The President of Burundi offered the Palipehutu-Forces nationales de libération 31 political posts and the release of political prisoners.

B. Electoral processes and human rights challenges

6. On the democracy front, several countries of the subregion underwent electoral processes or were preparing themselves for national legislative or presidential elections. In Angola, Burundi, Cameroon and Sao Tome and Principe, preparations for elections were made with the creation and reinforcement of new legislative bodies. In Burundi, a new electoral commission was set up to take charge of the general elections scheduled to be held in 2010, which are expected to put an end to the current transition period. The Arusha accords between the Government and the rebels had set the modalities for a sharing of power between different groups. In Cameroon, in December 2008, the Government announced the appointment of the members of the national electoral commission (ELECAM), in charge of the organization, management and supervision of all electoral processes and referendums in the country. Presidential elections are to be held in 2011. In Sao Tome and Principe, the National Assembly reinstated the National Electoral Commission and designated a former Justice Minister as its chairman in view of local elections in 2009 and legislative elections in 2010. The Commission is composed of members of all parties. In Angola, there is still no date for presidential elections, which have not been held since the end of the war in 2002. The last presidential elections in Angola were held in 1992. Legislative elections in Angola were held on 5 September 2008.

7. In the Republic of the Congo, on 12 July 2009, long-serving president Denis Sassou-Nguesso was re-elected for another seven-year term in office in an election boycotted by the opposition parties and with significant voter abstentions. At least six presidential candidates called for a nationwide boycott a few days prior to the elections, citing irregularities in the election registers and complaining that the State machinery had tilted the political playing ground towards a victory for the incumbent. At the time of finalizing the present report, the electoral dispute was referred to the country's Supreme Court, which officialized the results on 25 July. President Sassou-Nguesso was then sworn in, in early August 2009.

8. In Gabon, the death of long-serving President Omar Bongo Ondimba halfway through a presidential term threw the country into an unexpected electoral process, with scores of political personalities attempting to fill in the seemingly omnipotent role of the late President and heightening the political tension. Although constitutional order was scrupulously respected in the immediate aftermath of the President's death, with the appointment of the Senate President as interim President, the political atmosphere following announcement of the date of the elections was highly charged, and there were fears in certain quarters that the country might face unrest if the transition and electoral period were not carefully managed.

9. Earlier, before the unexpected death of President Bongo, senatorial elections had been held in Gabon on 18 January 2009, which had also been marred by claims of irregularities. In those elections, the ruling party, the Parti démocratique du Gabon had won over two thirds of the 102 seats. About 20 candidates from the various opposition parties, as well as from the Parti démocratique du Gabon, and some independents, had appealed to the Court over alleged irregularities and corruption. The Constitutional Court had examined several complaints lodged by candidates of the senatorial elections and had rejected the appeals.

III. Activities carried out from September 2008 to August 2009

A. Human rights activities

Situation of human rights

10. In several countries of the subregion, the dire situation of prisons continued to be of grave concern, especially in relation to overcrowding and failure to observe minimum standards. In Cameroon, there were several incidents of escapes of inmates. In the Bamenda prison, one person was shot dead during an incident on 26 October 2008. The prison, which had been built in the 1930s for about 100 inmates, currently accommodated around 700. Its security standards are considered insufficient. The approximately 300 inmates of Yokadouma prison went on a rampage on 22 April 2008, reportedly following the death of one of the inmates, apparently due to denial of proper medical treatment. In Gabon, on 19 January 2009, mutineers in the central prison in Libreville reportedly took four prison guards hostage, among them one pregnant woman, put fire to parts of the premises and occupied the police post. They demanded better detention conditions and effective trials for some of their number and insisted they would only negotiate with President Bongo. Two of the insurgents were reported to have died during the police intervention to reinstate order, and five others suffered injuries. Female prisoners were said to have been victims of sexual violence. The prison had been built in 1956 for 300 convicts, but presently accommodated about 1,500, without any modification to its structure. Sanitary conditions are deplorable. Some of the detainees have allegedly been waiting for their trial for many years, in violation of existing law.

11. There were continuing concerns relating to the denial of freedom of expression in parts of the region. Journalists were reportedly harassed, sanctioned, arrested and/or detained, including in Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Gabon. In Cameroon, civil society organizations signed a communiqué complaining about lack of respect for freedom of thought and

expression in the country. In particular, they cited the cases of a local commentator, detained and accused of offences against the Head of State for questioning the extensive closures of roads in the capital during movements of the presidential convoy, and of two teachers in Bamenda who had questioned the repeated absences of the President from the country. The Union of Cameroonian Journalists complained about remarks by the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Justice and Keeper of the Seals; and lately the Prosecutor General, who had accused journalists of lack of professionalism, alleging that the excessive dissemination in the media was violating ongoing legal procedures, because several media had reported about ongoing cases of corruption investigations. The Union asked its members to be more responsible in reporting on judicial cases, but not to give in to intimidation or manipulation. In Gabon, two European journalists, who had allegedly entered the country with a simple tourist visa, after their application for a press visa had been turned down, were detained just before leaving the country on 10 February 2009. Their employer, the media company Capa, stated that the Gabonese authorities had been informed and that the two had presented themselves at the Ministry of Communication upon their arrival on 5 February 2009. The journalists had been freed the same day, but their equipment was retained. Foreign journalists were said to be viewed with suspicion in Gabon due to the lawsuit, and the attendant media attention, taking place in France against the Presidents of the Congo, Gabon and Equatorial Guinea, who were suspected of illegal gains. In Rwanda, after several months of discussions, the Rwandan Parliament adopted a new media law on 23 February 2009, which prevents journalists from using unofficial information, and states that sources must be disclosed when courts so require, thus seriously impeding investigative journalism. However, the law increases access to public information by fining state officials who hide information. The new law has been criticized in Rwanda and internationally.

12. The situation of migrant workers worsened in some parts of the subregion, in particular, Burundi and Equatorial Guinea. Between January and February 2009, Burundian authorities were reported to have expelled about 800 illegal foreigners, mostly citizens of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwandans (approximately 600), but also Ugandans, Tanzanians, and Senegalese. According to sources, the numbers could even be higher, possibly reaching over 1,400 persons. The Government of Burundi alleged that foreigners were responsible for most of the crimes committed in the country and that repatriations were routine work. Some foreigners complained that policemen had intentionally destroyed valid Burundian residence permits. Elsewhere, the border between Equatorial Guinea and Cameroon was closed on 8 January 2009, upon a decision by the Government of Equatorial Guinea — supposedly to prevent illegal immigration. Many Cameroonians are reported to be working illegally in Equatorial Guinea, where they are often badly treated, deprived of their belongings or stigmatized as criminals. About 100 of these migrant workers have been repatriated to Cameroon since January 2009. The closure of the border has been of special concern for families living along either side, who have been separated.

13. Some legislative developments in the subregion are worthy of note. In Angola, on 15 December 2008, the National Assembly adopted a new law creating the Constitutional Commission tasked with formulating the future Angolan constitution. The law fixes a period of 75 days, from the moment of its adoption, during which political parties, state entities, civil society organizations and citizens in general can

submit proposals for the draft constitution. The Commission officially started to function 30 days after the adoption of the law.

14. In Burundi, the Parliament adopted a new Penal Code. The Senate had rejected the Code, but the lower chamber of Parliament reversed the decision. President Pierre Nkurunziza signed the Penal Code into law on 22 April 2009. The Code is generally considered to be a sign of progress. It also bans the death penalty. However, it includes a controversial clause criminalizing homosexuality, with imprisonment terms of up to 3 years.

Capacity-building activities

15. The Centre continued to focus its activities on countries where there was no United Nations human rights presence (OHCHR country office or a human rights component of a peacekeeping mission). Nonetheless, all countries of Central Africa are covered in the Centre's activities regarding capacity-building, sensitization programmes, in particular on transitional justice, peace and security and other issues of relevance at the subregional level.

16. The Centre continued to place the issues of women's rights, women's empowerment, violence against women and gender-based discrimination high on its agenda. Throughout the year, the Centre continued its series of training-of-trainers in the subregion: from 9 to 13 June and on 2 and 3 December 2008, the first and second series of training-of-trainers on gender and human rights was conducted in Brazzaville. From 4 to 8 May 2009, following a request from the Ministry of Social Affairs of Gabon, the Centre organized a one-week training-of-trainers on gender and human rights for the gender focal points of the Government of Gabon. The training was organized jointly with national trainers who had participated in previous trainings-of-trainers from civil society in Gabon. From 13 to 15 July 2009, the Centre organized a training-of-trainers from civil society on gender and human rights in Bafoussam, Cameroon.

17. The Centre also continued its collaboration with women's rights organizations. On 19 June 2008, the Centre gave a presentation on human rights instruments and mechanisms to a group of youth gathered by the association Women in Alternative Action in Cameroon. On 8 March 2008, the Centre took part in the celebration of International Women's Day. The celebration was a joint effort of United Nations agencies, in close cooperation with the Cameroonian Ministry of Women's Empowerment and the Family. In this framework, journalists and non-governmental organization representatives were invited to a ceremony co-chaired by the Ministry, the United Nations Resident Coordinator and the Director of the Centre.

18. The Centre strengthened its collaboration with indigenous peoples' groups in the region to enhance their capacity to deal with problems facing them. To that end, the Centre manages a subregional network of indigenous peoples who regularly exchange information and ideas. In March 2008, the Centre started an Internet information network for indigenous peoples and minorities from Central Africa. More than 200 individuals, mainly indigenous leaders from Central Africa and other countries, are on the mailing list and receive and exchange information on a regular basis on indigenous and minority issues in the subregion (for example, indigenous fellowships at OHCHR, local non-governmental organization initiatives for the promotion of indigenous rights, invitations to seminars, sharing of documentation, calls for proposals, etc.). The network was presented during the Durban Review

Conference as an example of good practices in the fight against discrimination. Some active members of the network were invited, on 15 and 16 April 2009, to a regional seminar on indigenous peoples' rights in Central Africa organized by the Centre. Representations from Governments and indigenous communities from Burundi, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad, the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gabon and Rwanda participated. Representatives of local administrations, natural parks and local non-governmental organizations were also invited. During the seminar, the participants extensively discussed the problems faced by indigenous communities in Central Africa, but also possible initiatives to jointly overcome the problems. The participants were sensitized to the rights contained in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and to the principle of free, prior and informed consent. On 9 August 2009, the Centre participated in the second official celebration of the International Day of the World's Indigenous People in Cameroon.

19. On 1 October 2008, Cameroon signed the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. On 2 and 3 December 2008, the Centre participated in two events organized by the Ministry of Social Affairs on the occasion of the seventeenth celebration of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities. On 3 December, the Centre delivered the official message of the Secretary-General, which highlighted the need to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and to include persons with disabilities in all development processes. The Ministry of Social Affairs had chosen the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities as the national theme for this seventeenth celebration of the International Day and mentioned the signature by Cameroon of the Convention on 1 October 2008. The need for social, educational, economic and professional integration of persons with disabilities was highlighted by their representative and acknowledged by the Government. On 15 April 2009, in celebration of an international day for the fight against discrimination, the Centre organized an "open door day" for 80 civil society organization leaders involved in the promotion and the protection of human rights, especially the rights of people living with disabilities.

20. Since September 2008, the Centre has conducted over 15 training sessions for Cameroonian police and gendarmerie officers of the criminal investigation training centre (*Centre de perfectionnement à la police judiciaire*) as well as police officers from countries of ECCAS trained at the regional police training centre (*Centre de perfectionnement aux techniques de maintien de l'ordre*) of Awae, Cameroon, including some who were preparing to be deployed to peacekeeping missions. The Centre provides them with information concerning the identification of situations in which human rights can be at risk in their everyday work and the international legal obligations that the representatives of the State authority have to abide by. Through interactive games and exercises, the police officers have an opportunity to reflect upon the concepts of equality, democracy, universalism of human rights and debate the opportunity and feasibility of using human rights in their everyday work.

21. The Centre continued to bring its regular support to conventional and non-conventional procedures. In particular, it continued to collaborate with the Special Procedures mandate-holders in the implementation of their mandate by paying particular attention to recommendations relevant to the subregion.

22. During the previous reporting period, six countries of the subregion had gone through the universal periodic review: Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad, the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Equatorial Guinea. Conclusions and recommendations were issued and the Centre will work with the concerned Governments and respective civil societies to follow up on their implementation.

23. During the reporting period, Angola was examined by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; Cameroon submitted reports to the Human Rights Committee, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, the Committee against Torture and the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and was examined by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women; Chad submitted reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the Committee against Torture and the Human Rights Committee and was examined by the following Committees: on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, against Torture and the Human Rights Committee; the Republic of the Congo was examined by the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination; the Democratic Republic of the Congo submitted a report to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and was examined by the Committee on the Rights of the Child; and Rwanda was examined by the Human Rights Committee and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. Burundi, the Central African Republic, Gabon and Sao Tome and Principe did not submit any report, nor were they examined by any Committee.

B. Democracy and rule of law activities

24. On 18 and 19 November 2008, the Centre delivered a training programme on human rights for parliamentarians of the Republic of the Congo co-organized with the Congolese National Assembly and aimed at introducing human rights standards and mechanisms to parliamentarians. Two experts from the Centre presented the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the different human rights conventions and their content, the work of the Committees and Special Procedures, the rights of vulnerable groups, and oriented the exercises towards concrete situations that parliamentarians might face in their everyday work. The opportunity was provided to the 15 parliamentarians who took part in the training to interactively examine their role in the promotion of human rights.

25. From 18 to 29 July 2009, the Centre sent a team to Gabon to make an assessment on how to further provide support to the Government in the area of promotion and protection of human rights, including during the presidential elections scheduled for 30 August. On this occasion, the team met with numerous political actors, international partners, as well as civil society representatives, and discussed various intervention strategies, including capacity-building for local actors working on the elections. A session with a network of journalists working on human rights was also conducted in Libreville.

C. Advisory services and technical cooperation

26. On 20 February 2009, the World Wide Fund for Nature, together with the support of four major non-governmental organizations working with indigenous peoples in Cameroon, convened a meeting to discuss a joint strategy to provide advocacy to the Ministry of Social Affairs, which had started working on a draft law on the rights of marginalized peoples. The Centre gave a presentation on the different international texts dealing with the rights of indigenous peoples and provided advice.

D. Promotion of peace and security in Central Africa

27. The Centre participated in the 28th meeting of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa, which was held from 4 to 8 May 2009 in Libreville. The Committee was established on 28 May 1992 by the Secretary-General pursuant to General Assembly resolution 46/37 B, in order to promote peace, security and development in the Central African region through confidence-building measures, including democratization and human rights, measures to limit arms proliferation, and disarmament. Pursuing its work on the "Sao Tome Initiative" under the two-year methodology and ECCAS leadership, adopted in 2008, the Committee decided to include fundamental human rights principles in the Code of Conduct of the Central Africa Multinational Force, and particularly the principles of Security Council resolutions 1325 (2000) and 1820 (2008). Within the initiative, the Committee also agreed to include the prohibition of the use of child soldiers in the legal instrument on the control of small arms and light weapons in the Central African subregion, which is also under elaboration.

E. Fellowship programme

28. Formerly known as an internship programme, the Centre's fellowship programme has continued gathering interest from both students and professionals of the subregion. As at July 2009, the Centre had received 13 fellows from Cameroon, Chad, the Congo, Gabon, the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The fellows help the Centre to conduct research on various human rights and democracy issues and they, in turn, benefit from their stay at the Centre to deepen their knowledge on the United Nations human rights machinery and procedures, as a result of which they are in a better position to contribute to relevant human rights and democracy initiatives in their home countries upon completion of the fellowship.

29. Details of each country's participation are as follows:

Cameroon	6
Chad	2
Congo	1
Central African Republic	1
Democratic Republic of the Congo	2
Gabon	1
Total	**13**

30. In order to encourage the participation of all countries of the subregion, especially those with a low representation rate in the fellowship programme, more outreach activities have been developed by the Centre. Thus fact sheets on the fellowship programme have been produced and distributed during all regional and subregional meetings in which the Centre has taken part.

F. Information, sensitization and documentation

31. The Centre continued providing online information to its almost 6,000 contacts, divided into several networks (general contacts, journalists, United Nations, civil society organizations, members of the diplomatic corps), on United Nations human rights issues and new developments in the field of media, information and transitional justice. The information was also provided to the public through the small documentation unit of the Centre. During the period under review, the resource centre registered over 1,000 visitors who were mostly Government officials, students, researchers, media professionals and civil society leaders.

32. A series of activities to mark the 2009 commemoration of International Women's Day took place with the support of the Centre.

33. Twenty-five journalists (members of the journalists' network) in Cameroon were trained on issues related to violence against women and the role the media can play in combating this phenomenon. In a one-day reflection workshop in October, a target was set in which the journalists committed to regular reporting on violence against women. In December 2008, members of the journalists' network in Gabon joined the Centre to organize week-long activities in commemoration of the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Sensitization activities were carried out in schools in Libreville, along with other activities, ending with a joint press conference by the regional representative and the Gabonese Human Rights Minister on 10 December 2008.

34. On 15 April 2009, the Centre convened an open door day on the issue of discrimination, in cooperation with Cameroonian and French civil society organizations. The various forms of discrimination against disabled persons were among the most debated subjects during the event, in which members of associations of disabled people participated.

35. The Centre developed a comprehensive outreach material strategy aimed at providing information to its different partners through printed, audiovisual and electronic formats. The Centre produced a comprehensive report and a documentary on the Centre's activities for the past three years. These documents were presented and distributed to partners during meetings and press activities. Several public information tools, such as thematic fact sheets and issues of "International Perspective" (replaced recently by "Rights and Democracy Focus") — the Centre's compilation of the most relevant press clippings — gave the Centre much room to inform counterparts on the evolution of human rights and democracy within the subregion. Over 20 issues of Rights and Democracy Focus have been published since its introduction in May 2009.

36. On 5 and 6 May 2009, upon request from the members of the Gabonese network for human rights, the Centre organized a training seminar on human rights for 27 journalists from Gabon. The aim of the training was to sensitize journalists on

human rights instruments and related mechanisms, in particular the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, and to recall the principles of accountability, respect of ethics and deontology and the role of journalists in promoting and protecting human rights.

IV. Development of partnerships

A. Collaboration with regional organizations

37. On 6 and 7 October 2008, in Libreville, ECCAS, in partnership with the Centre, organized an expert consultation on child trafficking in Central Africa with 25 experts coming from Cameroon, the Congo, Equatorial Guinea and Gabon. The participants, experts from civil society and Government representatives, had the opportunity to discuss the current situation of child trafficking in the subregion as well as the existing legal standards and good practices in each participating country. The participants adopted recommendations addressed to the members of ECCAS. On 11 and 12 May 2009, the Centre organized a follow-up to the seminar with a subregional workshop on campaigning techniques to fight child trafficking in Central Africa.

38. The Inter-Parliamentary Union, in collaboration with OHCHR, organized the second regional seminar for the involvement of parliamentarians in the work of treaty bodies in Gabon, from 4 to 6 March 2009. The Centre was invited to participate in the seminar. Over 80 participants attended, including parliamentarians, representatives of the Government of Gabon, representatives of national human rights institutions, civil society organizations, United Nations country teams and international organizations and media professionals.

39. The Centre continued to develop close relationships with the International Organization of la Francophonie, which provided the venue for the organization of two meetings with the Journalist Network on human rights in Gabon in March and May 2009.

40. The Centre benefited from logistical support from ECCAS during its missions in Gabon. This support has been provided within the framework of the memorandum of understanding between OHCHR and ECCAS.[1]

41. As part of the new strategy of the Centre, collaboration initiatives will be pursued in the coming year with regard to other organizations active in the subregion, such as ECCAS, the Gulf of Guinea Commission, the Southern African Development Community, and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region.

[1] Following the creation of the Yaoundé Centre, then High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mary Robinson, signed an official memorandum of understanding with General Secretary of ECCAS, Louis Sylvain-Goma, in which the two institutions pledged to work in close collaboration on issues of peace, human rights and democracy in the subregion, given the fact that they had similar mandates in these areas. The memorandum of understanding was signed on 10 July 2002.

B. Collaboration with civil society, donors and the diplomatic community

42. In Cameroon, from July to September 2008, the Centre participated in several workshops organized by the American Bar Association aimed at producing a reference manual for prosecuting traffickers in persons in Cameroon. The goal of the manual is to provide prosecutorial options to those seeking to convict traffickers. It will also help to educate law enforcement on the elements of trafficking and strategies for combating the phenomenon in Cameroon. This manual was first used for a training of police officer trainers on human trafficking in Cameroon organized by the American Bar Association at the National Police School of Cameroon on 11 September 2008 and has since been used for other training programmes for Cameroonian magistrates and lawyers.

43. The Centre benefited from staffing support from the Netherlands and France, both of which funded Junior Professional Officer posts and actively supported the Centre's programmes in the region. The Centre thanks these Governments for their support and recommends more engagement by other donors.

44. The Centre has developed a partnership with the international non-governmental organization World Wild Fund for Nature present in Cameroon. On 31 January and 1 February 2009, the Centre participated in the Fund staff retreat in Mbalmayo, Cameroon. On the occasion, two days were dedicated to the training of Fund staff on indigenous peoples' rights. On 17 April 2009, the Centre participated in a workshop organized by the Fund on the elaboration of a negotiation strategy for formal agreements of joint management of the national park of Campo Ma'an in eastern Cameroon between local indigenous peoples and the local administration. The Centre and the Fund also collaborated in the organization of a regional seminar on indigenous peoples' rights held on 14 and 15 April 2009 and will continue working with the Government of Cameroon to draft a national law on indigenous peoples' rights.

45. On 28 May 2009, the Centre invited the ambassadors of the subregion as well as representatives of the main Cameroonian ministries to a one-day brainstorming session on possible orientations and activities of the Centre for the biennium 2009-2011. Key thematic priorities were identified and discussed, such as gender, economic, social and cultural rights, the role of the Centre in relation to HIV/AIDS and the right to a healthy environment.

46. On 26 June 2009, on the occasion of the celebration of the International Day in support of victims of torture, the Centre organized a conference in Yaoundé, in partnership with a Cameroonian non-governmental organization for 40 members of the civil society platform against torture.

C. Collaboration with United Nations agencies

47. The Centre continued expanding its area of collaboration with United Nations agencies during the reporting period. In November 2008, the Centre collaborated with the Department of Political Affairs to organize a regional conference focusing on democracy and peaceful political transitions. The conference was held in Bamako and attendees included academic experts, non-governmental organizations, the Commonwealth, United Nations agencies, members of national election

commissions and dignitaries representing different Governments. In addition, the Centre and the Department of Political Affairs worked together to support the work of ECCAS in promoting peace and security including by attending ECCAS meetings on these issues. The Centre's special relationship with the Department of Political Affairs, which has been ongoing since the creation of the Centre, will be further consolidated in the coming year through similar collaborations.

48. Under the Action 2 Global Programme, the Centre was the driving force for two activities. From 19 to 23 October 2008, programme staff from the United Nations agencies in Cameroon took part in a training programme on a human rights-based approach to programming, co-organized by the Centre and the office of the Resident Coordinator. Additionally, a consultant finalized the verification of Cameroonian legislation in the light of the international human rights instruments adhered to by Cameroon. The Centre is reviewing the report.

49. The Centre took part in United Nations Day celebrations, as is customary every year. On 22 October 2008, United Nations agencies held an open door day at the United Nations Information Centre in order to inform partners and interested persons in the Government, the diplomatic corps, and civil society about their activities in Cameroon and the region. The Centre distributed abundant documentation in order to sensitize the public on the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. On 24 October an official ceremony was held at the Ministry of Foreign Relations of Cameroon.

50. From 3 to 8 December 2008, the Centre brought its technical support to United Nations country team members in Equatorial Guinea to develop a joint programme on HIV/AIDS. The Centre has been working in close partnership with the United Nations country teams in the subregion and has provided substantial support in the design of their activities. In Equatorial Guinea, the Centre has developed a close relationship with, and has now become a permanent part of, the United Nations country teams, being regularly involved in and consulted on their planning, work and activities.

51. The Centre manages the joint OHCHR/United Nations Development Programme project entitled "Assisting Communities Together", which aims to increase democracy and human rights awareness among non-governmental organization stakeholders in Cameroon. There are six non-governmental organizations benefiting from the project, which has come to the end of its sixth phase. The role of the Centre is to advise non-governmental organizations and support the building of their capacities to develop human rights education programmes and to integrate human rights-based approaches into their projects.

52. On 30 and 31 March 2009, the Centre participated in a workshop organized by the International Labour Organization for all United Nations agencies on proposals for the integration of the new draft United Nations Development Group guidelines on indigenous issues into the United Nations Development Assistance Framework document for Cameroon. The Centre gave a one-hour presentation on indigenous peoples in Central Africa, their problems and their rights.

53. From 1 to 3 July 2009, the Centre participated in a retreat in Cameroon for the United Nations country team of Equatorial Guinea. The occasion provided an opportunity to discuss areas of cooperation for "delivering as one" in Equatorial Guinea. The Centre was asked to provide support in the field of human rights, in

particular on the universal periodic review mechanisms and the implementation of the United Nations country team programme on governance for the period 2008-2012.

D. Other related human rights developments in the region

54. Within the context of the Great Lakes Initiative, an ongoing project under the United Nations Action 2 Programme, OHCHR deployed a regional human rights adviser who began work in February 2009 to support the United Nations country teams in Burundi, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the member States of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region to foster joint activities and address regional human rights challenges. Six of the International Conference member States are in Central Africa (Burundi, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Republic of Congo, Rwanda and Uganda). OHCHR provides support to the protocols and projects of the International Conference addressing a number of regional human rights, such as the prevention of genocide, the rights of internally displaced populations, the combat against sexual violence, illegal exploitation of resources and impunity. Other human rights issues addressed by the regional human rights adviser during the reporting period, in close cooperation with the United Nations country teams, the International Conference and the Governments in the region include: the protection of foreigners from expulsion from Burundi and the United Republic of Tanzania; the situation of the Batwa and the albinos; the identification of people at risk of statelessness; and human rights in the context of electoral processes.

55. The Pact on Security, Stability and Development in the Great Lakes region signed by its 11 member States in 2006 (and ratified by 9 to date) provides an important legal and political framework for the promotion and protection of human rights in the region and a monitoring mandate through the setting up of a centre for the promotion of democracy, good governance, human rights and civic education, including a regional observatory on human rights, which will require OHCHR support, especially for the effective use of its monitoring mandate.

56. The regional observatory will be linked to a network of national human rights institutions and observatories in the member States of the International Conference. This will bring additional value to the conflict management efforts of the International Conference secretariat through the development of an early warning system and the provision of predictive and current analytic reports on situations that merit urgent attention for pre-emptive and corrective action.

57. In another development that has the potential to strengthen the human rights institutional capacity in the subregion, the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC) appointed, in 2008, a commissioner in charge of human rights, good governance and human and social development. The commissioner was appointed from Equatorial Guinea and will be based at CEMAC headquarters in Bangui. The role of the commissioner is to ensure that issues related to human rights and good governance in the CEMAC region are addressed in a unified manner and recommendations made to States on how to best promote these values. The Yaoundé Centre hopes to collaborate actively with the commissioner to further improve the human rights situations in the subregion. In this regard a working meeting with the CEMAC commissioner is planned, with the aim of identifying areas in which the

Yaoundé Centre can collaborate with the office of the commissioner in the domain of human rights and good governance.

V. Conclusions and recommendations

58. During recent years, the Yaoundé Centre has become more visible and has been solicited by many governmental and non-governmental human rights stakeholders and actors. In this context, the Centre has delivered critical trainings to a whole range of State and non-State actors and has diversified its interlocutors, creating the basis for more effective implementation of its mandate in the coming years. The Centre has also created specialized networks of experts in the areas of the media, transitional justice and indigenous peoples, worked on a joint programme of democracy strengthening with the Department of Political Affairs, provided technical expertise to Governments in the subregion and supported the capacity of many non-governmental entities. It has also enhanced its work to mainstream human rights in the work of other United Nations agencies.

59. For the next biennium, the Centre will increase its focus on anti-discrimination, the combat against impunity, the protection of economic and social rights and capacity-building for national human rights institutions.

60. The Centre will support Governments and other stakeholders to implement the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action as well as the Outcome of the Durban Review Conference.

61. Work in new areas will also be conducted in the next biennium. Millions of people in countries that are rich in oil, gas and minerals live in abject poverty. With good governance, the exploitation of these resources can generate large revenues to foster growth and reduce poverty. Weak governance may result in poverty, corruption, and conflict. The Centre will therefore focus in the next biennium on equitable distribution of natural resources, and in particular the extractive industries.

62. Finally, as part of its subregional strategy to promote human rights more comprehensively, the Centre will increase its cooperation with national human rights institutions in the area to support the creation of such institutions in countries where they do not exist and to build the capacity of institutions that exist.